



Sex Work Stigma: Opportunist Migrants in London

■ **Graham Scambler**

University College London

ABSTRACT

The social institution of prostitution or sex work has a long and varied history in the West, during almost all of which women plying their trade within it have been stigmatized. After a brief excursus on contemporary sex work and the concept of stigma itself, this article applies the author's *jigsaw model* to throw light on the causal role of social structures in shaping sex work stigma, in relation to women migrants from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics working as escorts in central London, typically on a short-term opportunistic basis. Interviews with a small snowball sample of a dozen women inform and illustrate the analysis. The differential causal effects of relations of class, command, gender and ethnicity, as well as those of stigma, are considered. It is argued that stigma relations in a given context or figuration cannot be grasped in isolation, but are always part of a nexus of social structures of varying causal importance.

KEY WORDS

disorganized capitalism / migration / prostitution / sex work / social structures / stigma

The 'whore stigma' might be regarded as paradigmatic of attributions of shame. Although there have been exceptions, times and places in which adult 'prostitutes' have been accepted, even accorded privileges, these have been culturally circumscribed and fleeting. Moreover, the shame accruing almost ubiquitously to women supplying sexual services has rarely extended to their male clienteles (Ringdal, 2004; Roberts, 1992). The present article offers an account of possible shifts in the nature and perception of prostitution in Britain during what has variously been called global or disorganized capitalism, second modernity and even post-modernity, that is, the period from the early

1970s to the present. It concentrates on opportunistic migrant escort workers from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet states domiciled in central London. Its explanatory focus is on the causal salience of social structures, notably relations of class, command, gender and ethnicity, as well as those of stigma and deviance.

Representations of Sex Workers: Myth and Reality

Pheterson (1993) proffers a list of the prostitute’s offences against gendered norms of honour/dishonour which is in some ways emblematic of the modernity of liberal and organized capitalism, although it continues to have resonance. It comprises seven items: having sex with strangers; having sex with multiple partners; taking sexual initiative and control and possessing expertise; asking a fee for sex; being committed to satisfying men’s lusts and fantasies; being out alone on the streets at night dressed to incite or attract men’s desires; being in the company of supposedly drunk or abusive men whom they can either handle (as ‘common’ or ‘vulgar’ women) or not handle (as ‘victimized’ women). The whores or ‘bad girls’ in this representation – calling to mind street rather than indoor workers – stand in marked contrast to Madonnas or ‘good girls’. To Pheterson’s list might be appended: vector of disease; source of transmission into the respectable community of heterosexual families of sexually transmitted infections (STI), including, latterly, HIV/AIDS.

There is no need here to expose the mythology behind the whore stigma and the general stereotyping of sex workers, except perhaps to emphasize the sheer diversity to be found in the sex industry (see Day and Ward, 2004a; Plant, 1990; Scambler and Scambler, 1997). Figure 1 below presents a typology of contemporary adult sex worker careers, together with paradigmatic examples. An individual can move from one career to another (e.g. from opportunist to worker). This typology reflects the heterogeneity of those involved and of their circumstances and motivations, ranging from abduction and something like sexual slavery at one extreme to what presents as a freely-chosen work strategy at the other.

There are around 80,000 sex workers in Britain (approximately 1.3 per 1000 of the total population) (Kinnell, 1999; Ward and Day, 2004). Of these, 85 to 90 percent are female, although there is a much higher proportion – 30 to 40 percent – of male sex workers in central London. London and the South

<i>Career</i>	<i>Paradigmatic example</i>
Coerced	abducted, trafficked
Destined	family, peers in trade
Survivors	drug users, single parents, debtors
Workers	permanent job
Opportunists	project financing
Bohemians	casual, without need

Figure 1 A typology of sex work careers

may be distinctive too in the proportion of sex workers offering their services indoors (four out of five), compared to the 30 to 70 percent engaged in street work in the Midlands and the North of England (Kinnell, 1999; Ward and Day, 2004). It has been estimated that more than 8000 women work indoors in London, out of at least 730 licensed premises (*bbc.co.uk*, 2005).

Data have been comprehensively collected since the mid 1980s, coinciding with the (misplaced) fear that sex workers were key vectors in the spread of HIV/AIDS. These fears may not have engendered a full-blown moral panic, but two major newspapers in 1992 speculated that 75 percent of sex workers active in the King's Cross area of London had HIV/AIDS (Delgado, 1992; *Sunday Express*, 1992). A more accurate estimate would have been less than 2 percent (Day and Ward, 2004a). There is an echo here of a fear of contagion characteristic of Victorian Britain (Walkowitz, 1980).

Current data suggest a number of trends. Focusing on the years 1985 to 2002, Ward et al. (2004) note that in London, female sex workers – that is, outdoor *and* indoor workers – are now more likely to have been born beyond British shores (63% in 2002 compared with 25% in 1985); to have entered the industry at an older age (median 24 years in 2002 compared with 20 years in 1985); and to use condoms (with the exception of oral sex). They were less likely to report a previous STI (32% in 2002 compared with 80% in 1985); and there was a decline in the prevalence of acute STI (from 25% in 1985 to 8% in 2002), acute STI being associated with younger age, younger age at entry to sex work, being new to sex work and inconsistent condom use. Rates of drug use are reported to be higher among street than indoor workers, with some evidence of a 'co-dependency' in the way in which street sex and drug markets operate (May and Hunter, 2006). The proportion of men visiting sex workers has also increased – in London in 2001, 9 percent of men admitted paying for sex in the previous five years, compared with 5 percent in 1991 (Johnson et al., 2001). These figures are probably conservative. In the USA, Monto and McRee found that male clients of sex workers did not differ in significant ways from a nationally representative sample of men, concluding that 'customers as a category differ from other men in degree rather than quality' (2005: 505). It seems likely that this also applies in London (see Ward et al., 2005).

Prostitution or sex work cannot be taken to imply a single set of relations between employer, worker and client. Before broaching the issue of 'red collar' employment relations directly, however, it is worth briefly rehearsing some of the ideal typical properties of 'voluntary adult sex work'. Sex workers, first, typically remain in control of encounters with clients, a factor ironically sometimes held against them, as reflected in Pheterson's portrayal of the whore stigma. Moreover, most sex workers stake out their moral territories, holding on to their autonomy via a veto on clients and/or sexual practices, traditionally kissing but contracting now among some workers to practices like French kissing, 'oral without'/'coming in mouth' (OWO/CIM) or anal sex. This is not to underplay the very real risks on those exceptional occasions when control is lost (Barnard, 1993). The sex worker–client encounter, second, typically occupies

a space that simulates personal, private, intimate space, termed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) 'smooth space', but which is actually public, commercialized, regulated or 'striated space'. The sex worker experiences the encounter as striated space – 'within which time ticks so as to mark off units exchanged and money earned' – but works to convince the client he is experiencing smooth space, within which time 'flows'. The permeability and reversibility of sex worker and client time, however, is considerable (Brewis and Linstead, 1998).

Third, sex work typically comprises a form of emotional labour: this can be very intense if a client seeks a simulated space, a mock intimacy, where a version of what Brewis and Linstead call his 'secret self' (1998: 230) can gain assurance. Sanders (forthcoming) found emotional labour to be a major component of the work of indoor workers in Birmingham. The sex worker, fourth, typically develops a 'manufactured identity' for the workplace, often cemented by ritual practices around time and space. This is both an ego-defence and a business strategy to attract and maintain clientele (Sanders, 2005; see also Phoenix, 2000). Fifth, the sex worker typically works long hours, partly to earn enough to make the job 'tolerable', but also so as not to permit sufficient respite from it to make returning to it difficult. No amount of financial compensation, O'Connell Davidson (1998) maintains, can entirely eradicate or afford escape from the whore stigma. There is, finally, no reliable or effective release from 'felt stigma' (Scambler and Hopkins, 1986), namely, a sense of shame coupled with a fear of potential rejection, even ostracism, on the part of significant others *should they find out*.

In assessing the denotation of sex *as work* it is important to judge what kind of employment relations these seven ideal typical characteristics reflect. I have referred elsewhere to the 'paradox of attention', which suggests that representations of prostitutes/sex workers often reflect the projects of those observing them (Scambler, 1997). This, combined with the lack of comparative data – permitting comparisons of the backgrounds and behaviours of sex workers and, say, students, secretaries or nurses – bedevils the literature. Pateman (1988) has rejected the 'liberal' thesis that prostitutes be regarded as sex workers, insisting that they 'sell themselves', which sets them apart from all other forms of work. Certainly there are sex workers who feel this way, not all of them in the categories of coerced, destined or survivors, and I have indicated that they typically undertake defensive identity work. Felt stigma is the rule rather than the exception. It is a moot point, however, whether sex work poses more of a risk to the worker's sense of self than all other occupations. Gherardi (1995) suggests that other types of service work are closer to prostitution 'in its true sense' than is generally acknowledged, citing employers' command over the sexuality of workers like hostesses, saleswomen, receptionists and secretaries.

Opportunistic Migrant Escort Workers in London

Between a quarter and a third of migrant sex workers in London come from Eastern Europe or the former Soviet states. The partial intrusion of capitalism

into these countries has occasioned many changes: 'many people face a precarious economic situation following the closure of state industries, the ending of food subsidies and declining welfare provision. Women have been harshly affected and sex inequalities have increased' (Ward, 2002: 80). There has been a decline in rates of women in formal employment – between 1985 and 1997 of 40 percent in Hungary, 33 percent in Latvia, 31 percent in Estonia, 24 percent in Lithuania, 21 percent in Russia, 16 percent in Slovenia, 13 percent in Poland, and 12 percent in the Czech Republic – and two-thirds of eastern European countries have witnessed a decline too in the proportion of girls attending school (Ward and Day, 2004; see also Pollert, 2003). Ward (2002: 80) sees an expansion in the informal economy – 'including trade in sex as a temporary survival strategy or, for some, a medium term strategy out of poverty' – as 'inevitable'.

'Migrant' in this article is used in a generic sense to refer to women who travel to London from Eastern Europe or the former Soviet republics to work as opportunist escort workers, hiring sexual services through agencies. As Agustin (2006a) rightly insists, however, the use of the word 'migrant' is problematic. Migrants to a city like London comprise a heterogeneous group, varying by legal status, country of origin, pathway and motivation. Nor does the conventional 'push–pull' distinction do justice to this heterogeneity (Massey et al., 1993). Although the 'push' factor of limited or shrinking opportunity and the 'pull' factor of high earnings are clearly relevant, there remains what Agustin calls 'the conundrum of women's agency'. Agency may be structured, but it is not structurally determined.

Two major discourses inform current 'official' British representations of migrant sex workers. The first is the *public health* discourse, which although mobilized initially around the moral panic of an AIDS pandemic has exerted a generally liberal influence (Scambler et al., 1990). 'Surveillance research' has produced evidence not only that rates of HIV/AIDS among sex workers remain low in cities like London, but that the rates of migrant sex workers, contrary to racial and sex worker stereotyping, are equivalently low, and for STI generally as well as for HIV/AIDS (Day and Ward, 2004b). The second discourse is that of *sexual trafficking*, which is less benign, holding as it does that the 'Natashas' from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet countries have all been kidnapped, tricked or otherwise coerced (Malarek, 2004). Agustin points out that the term 'trafficking' is often interpreted 'so that all people who help migrants become "traffickers", including family, friends, lovers, agents and entrepreneurs' (2006a: 129–130). This analysis applies to the Sexual Offences Act 2003, which leaves the interpretive work on what constitutes trafficking to the courts (Brooks-Gordon, 2006: 41). Although there are undoubtedly migrants in the category of coerced, these are much less common than dramatized newspaper and TV journalism implies, and in London at least are growing scarcer (Alexander, 2004). Many escort workers now fall into the category of opportunists, women with discrete projects, whether to fund higher education, buy an apartment, support kin or generally enhance their prospects or wellbeing. For illustrative purposes I shall refer to cases from a snowball sample of a dozen female sex workers.

Methods and Sample Characteristics

A dozen women working as escorts attached to one of four central London agencies comprised a snowball sample, the aim being to explore with them some of the issues touched on above. While their testimonies do not bear the full weight of the arguments of this article, they are consonant with them. The initial contact was made through one of the agencies. Three of the agencies specialized in women from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Republics: two of the 12 women had come to London from Russia, the rest from countries recently admitted to the European Union. The two Russian passport-holders were the only ones working ‘illegally’, although none of the 12 was paying tax on her earnings. I contacted the women by mobile phone, all of them accepting peer-sanctioned requests for unstructured, exploratory interviews either in their flats or in local cafes. The average length of interview was 45 minutes. All spoke passable English. The interviews were often arranged at short notice and were not recorded, although notes were taken. The age range was 19–30 years, with a mean of 23 years of age. Some of the core pertinent characteristics of the sample are contained in Figure 2, in which, to protect confidentiality, the women’s names are neither their own nor those they work under.

STUDY NAME	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	CHILDREN	EDUCATION LEVEL	WORKING TIME
Sarah	19	Single	None	School	< Month
Anna	21	Separated	One (age 2)	Graduate	< Month
Carla	20	Single	None	School	< Month
Leah	23	Divorced	None	School	> Month
Susan	20	Single	None	Undergraduate	< Month
Jenny	21	Single	None	School	< Month
Cara	22	Married	One (age 2)	School	< Month
Gabby	27	Single	None	Graduate	> Month
Tina	20	Single	None	School	> Month
Lolita	25	Separated	One (age 2)	Undergraduate	> Month
Wendy	30	Separated	One (age 2)	Graduate	< Month
Ivy	25	Single	None	Graduate	> Month

Figure 2 Characteristics of sample (n = 12)

Cara, aged 22 years, was married with a son aged two years. The true nature of her London visit was unknown to her husband, with whom she still lived. She was the only member of the sample in a continuing relationship. A few of the women had confided in trusted friends ‘at home’. However, only Leah, aged 23 years and divorced, had disclosed her sex work to her family of origin; she had been working as an escort for several months, having been a secretary in London for over a year before that, and her mother, sister and nephew were about to come from Slovakia to join her. Of the 12 women, only five had been escorts for over a month at the time of interview. This was the first experience of escort work for 10 of them.

For all of the women, sex work was an opportunity to make a lot of money quickly: one-half had taken the initiative themselves, two of them after working in London first, as a secretary (Leah) and a waitress (Lolita), while the other half knew someone else, usually someone 'at home', who had done the same thing and provided introductions. None of the women had been approached initially by an agency. Only one, 19 year old Sarah from the suburbs of Moscow, had accumulated unpaid debts to agency personnel (of around £6500) en route to London. She was the only one who was struggling to 'make a lot of money quickly'.

The four agencies cited prices of £150–200 per hour and £500–1000 per night for women's services. These services included OWO and possibly CIM, services denied by many indigenous workers. Penetrative sex, vaginal or more rarely anal, was with condoms. Monitoring the agencies' websites over a calendar month – May 2005 – I found that the services of 78 different women were advertised on 1 May. Although the figure at the end of the month was much the same (79), 40 percent of the initial 78 had by then left the agencies; most, my interviewees told me, to return 'home' after pre-calculated 'shifts' to raise funds (they had not simply transferred to alternative agencies or 'gone independent'). This high turnover supports the notion of discrete projects characteristic of opportunist sex workers.

The agencies took 33 percent of the fee for sexual services paid in cash to the women. Out of the remainder, the women had to find and pay rental on a flat and fund living expenses. None of those interviewed had been trafficked, but, as mentioned earlier, Sarah did have substantial debts to pay off. Cutting out the agency by making appointments directly with regular clients was possible but risky.

The Jigsaw Model: Logics, Relations and Figurations

The jigsaw model was devised to facilitate examining the causal potency of social structures in shaping events in the social world. It has three components. The first is a 'best guess' at the *overall picture* of the dynamic, complex and highly differentiated social world in which we live and participate. At the very least this should embrace the principal continuities/discontinuities comprising our present social domain. Figure 3 lists some of the most prominent features of contemporary British society of direct relevance to this article (see Beck, 2000; Giddens, 1990, 1992, 1994; Gross, 2005; Scambler, 2002; Sklair, 2000).

- (1) Glocalization (ie going global *and* local)
- (2) Reinvigoration of class relations at the expense of command relations (giving rise to a new income inequality)
- (3) Post welfare statism
- (4) Politics of personal responsibility
- (5) Destandardization of work
- (6) Culture-ideology of consumerism
- (7) Post-modern culture
- (8) Problematic of family (dis)enchantment
- (9) New dynamic for identity formation

Figure 3 Core aspects of the overall picture

The second component is a series of applications of the model that can be expressed in terms *logics*, *relations* and *figurations*, each application contributing a ‘piece of the jigsaw’. The concept of logic captures the coherence, thrust and causal potential of social structures as generative mechanisms (Scambler, 2002). Each logic is associated with a set of relations that can be studied indirectly through its effects on events across any number of figurations. For example, the logic of the regime of capital accumulation is associated with relations of social class that impact on events in settings ranging from strategy formation in transnational companies to mundane dyadic encounters.

The third component of the jigsaw model is a process of *dialectical reasoning*, whereby the sense of the overall picture informs applications of the model and applications of the model inform the sense of the overall picture. The same figuration can *and should* be revisited in terms of a variety of logics/relations. Figure 4 summarizes the principal logics/relations represented in the sociological exploration of opportunist sex work on the part of women from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet states practising as escorts in London.

Logics	Relations
Regime of capital accumulation	Class
Mode of Regulation	Command
Patriarchy	Gender
Tribalism	Ethnic
Shame	Stigma

Figure 4 Logics/Relations salient for understanding opportunist migrant sex work in London

If a particular dyad of logic/relations bears principal causal responsibility for events in a given figuration, then it might be said to be *categorical*. If a dyad plays a causal role but is itself derivative of another, then it can be described as *derivative*. And if it carries causal weight but is neither categorical nor derivative, then the term used will be *circumstantial* (Scambler, 2002).

Explicating Sex Work Stigma Structurally

For Goffman (1968), stigmatized individuals offend against ‘norms of identity or being’, whether this is manifested via (‘tribal’) racial or religious affiliation, character faults or bodily deformity. It is not what they *do* but what they *are*. Their deficit is *ontological* rather than *moral* (Scambler and Hopkins, 1986). Goffman’s contribution is noteworthy for its unorthodox relationship to the notion of structure. Rather than study social structure per se, he shifted the emphasis to face-to-face interaction and dwelt on the *structure of interaction*: ‘to describe the rules regulating a social interaction is to describe its structure’ (Goffman, 1967: 144). There is little here to indicate the causal input of social structures like class or command; structures having something of the ‘external’ character of Durkheimian social facts.

Link and Phelan (2001) advance a conceptual model of stigma, acknowledging that the labelling, stereotyping, distancing from others and loss of status that characterize stigma are made possible only by the differential distribution of social, economic and political power. Parker and Aggleton (2003) flesh out just such a model in calling for an account of the stigma of HIV that recognizes stigma's functioning 'at the point of intersection between *culture*, *power* and *difference*'. Stigma and stigmatization, they contend, are at the core of the social order; and the social – or symbolic – order 'promotes the interests of dominant groups as well as distinctions and hierarchies of ranking between them, while legitimating that ranking by convincing the dominated to accept existing hierarchies through processes of hegemony' (Parker and Aggleton, 2003: 6). Stigma and stigmatization are intimately linked to the reproduction of inequality and exclusion. Stigma marks and patrols the boundaries of the social or symbolic order, this order ultimately comprising a form of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 1977).

The logic of shame and stigma relations is reproduced rather than produced during the face-to-face interactions analysed by Goffman. Across numerous figurations, in fact, this dyad is derivative of the logic of the regime of capital accumulation and class relations and/or the logic of the mode of regulation and command relations. For example, shame in disorganized capitalism is now routinely attributed to recipients of welfare and to those in need of care. Stigmatization, whether enacted or felt, is rarely seen in anything like a 'pure form'. This point requires amplification. If the logic of shame and stigma relations issues in a theory of *stigmatization*, the logic of the regime of capital accumulation and class relations issues in a theory of *exploitation* and the logic of the mode of regulation and command relations issues in a theory of *oppression*. What is missing from orthodox sociological explorations of stigmatizing attributes or traits is an acknowledgement that the disadvantage accruing through stigmatization is often 'mixed in with', even secondary to, exploitation and oppression.

Logics, Relations and Opportunistic Migrant Sex Workers

Attention will be paid here to the logics of the regime of capital accumulation, their mode of regulation, patriarchy, tribalism and shame, and to their respective relations of class, command, gender, ethnicity and stigma. For convenience, references will be confined to the 'short-hand' of sets of relations. The analysis is cumulative and leads back to an overall picture of life in contemporary London and Britain.

Class Relations

Any exercise of agency on the part of young women migrating to Britain's sex industry from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet states must be understood against the structural background of declining job prospects in the formal economy, and even the decline of basic schooling. This new and heavily gendered

inequality in post-communist Eastern Europe and beyond can be traced causally to the resurgence of class relations in the disorganized or global capitalism championed and exported from the post-welfare statist West. If sex work is indirectly fuelled by the strategic action of an increasingly globalized and *licit* capitalist-executive, the strategic action of the sex industry's own *illicit* and increasingly globalized cabal of 'impresarios' operating in the informal economy, mimics and caricatures more formal relations of class. Agathangelou refers to the latter as 'small potatoes':

Many of the men and women who manage the desire industries come from working-class backgrounds and find themselves 'choosing' the best option out of the few available to them to generate fast cash and integration into the middle class. Despite increased cash flow, these men and women who employ the same methods that the agents of the formal economy use to expropriate the surplus-value of the working-class labour and with the use of force remain the 'underclass' who engages in illegal activities. (2004: 127)

Rates of profit and exploitation can be exceptionally high. Even highly paid workers can be profitably exploited. Carla, aged 20 years and living with an alcoholic father in Riga, said she could earn in two hours of escort work in London as much as she could earn in a month 'at home'; but her stint of two weeks still offered a considerable return for her agency, and she was only one of 23 on its books. Carla's project was to earn enough to get a flat on her own and study. She had spent two weeks as an escort in Zurich six months prior to coming to London.

Class relations are important not only in providing a recruitment pool for sex work entrepreneurs and in securing the potential to commodify and exploit women's bodies, but also in shaping cultural change. Insufficient attention is paid to the way disorganized capitalism's post-modern culture is a facet of what Sklair (2000) calls a 'culture-ideology of consumption', functional for the regime of capital accumulation. 'Functional for' should not be understood as a synonym for 'determined by'. The post-modernization of culture might not have occurred, or might have taken qualitatively different forms while still being 'structured by' and 'functional for' the vested interests and opportunity costs associated with class placements (Archer, 1995). Culture, no less than agency, is structured without being structurally determined.

A key feature of post-modern culture for explaining stigma among opportunist Eastern European and former Soviet sex workers in London is the displacement of what Lyotard (1984) designated (unified, universal) *grand* by (fragmented or relativized) *petit* narratives. The relevance of this here is well illustrated by Gross' (2005: 286) reflections on the 'detraditionalization of intimacy'. He argues that while the 'regulative' tradition of 'lifelong, internally stratified marriage' has declined, the 'meaning-constitutive' tradition, or 'the image of the form of couplehood inscribed in this regulative tradition', continues to play a central role in structuring contemporary intimacy. This has implications not only for the *grand* narratives of Gross' regulative tradition or of hierarchical heterosexuality in general, but also for extra- or non-'couplehood' sexual relations; the more so in an era of 'plastic sexuality', or sexuality easily and readily disassociated

from procreation (Giddens, 1992). Eroticism, as Bauman (1998) observes, has now been 'emancipated' from sexual reproduction *and love*.

Related to this cultural displacement of *grand* by *petit* narratives is the notion of *self-turnover* (Scambler, 2001). This refers to the enhanced capacity post-modern individuals have not only to *present* differently by audience and figuration – a process subtly and exhaustively analysed by Goffman and epitomized in Sanders' idea of manufactured identity – but to *be* different. People do not merely present as but *are* multiple selves. If this is not a new phenomenon, especially in the sex industry, it has arguably *grown easier* as relativistic *petit* narratives have displaced universalistic *grand* narratives as rationales for identity-formation and sense of self. All the women I interviewed experienced felt stigma, but almost all too were lucid about their time-bound instrumentalism. Being away from home territory seemed to aid their instrumentalism rather than augment their stigma. Gabby, an experienced 27 year old escort, said she can surprise even herself with the ease with which she can adopt and dispense with her manufactured identity. It was as if, *for them*, sex work stigma was confined to one of a set of identities, linked to a single (relativized) *petit* narrative. They both *are* and *are not* sex workers; and this in an era not only of plastic sexuality but also of 'deregulated' intimacy and a plethora of marketable and marketed eroticisms.

Command Relations

Although command relations have become more answerable to those of class in the globalized post-welfare state era of disorganized capitalism, the former, in the absence of the immanent threat of a legitimization crisis, reflect a more not less interventionist state, encouraging some to write not only of a 'marketized' but of a 'regulatory' state (Moran, 2003). The paradoxical by-product of the new mode of regulation of the state in disorganized capitalism has been a more not less insistent and colonizing political will (Scambler, 2002).

Until recently the state has remained semi-detached from Britain's sex industry. Command relations have been causally influential, but more by their absence than their presence. They have resulted in oppression not least when sex work has remained 'unseen' and unaccountable. New policy initiatives, however, including and subsequent to the Sexual Offences Act 2003, have mined trafficking discourse to focus increasingly on migrant 'Natashas'. Considered against the background of Agustin's research on migration regimes and sex work, Brooks-Gordon's (2006) socio-legal study of 'prostitution policy' suggests that a new oppressive spotlight is being turned on these 'trafficked victims' who may be 'helped' to leave sex work (and Britain) whether they like it or not. Migrant sex workers may be joining street workers as prostitution's 'seen' undesirables.

Gender Relations

Gender relations were in place in one guise or another long before the emergence of the relations of class and command addressed so far. If the logics of the regime

of capital accumulation and its mode of regulation, and their respective relations of class and command, are neither intrinsically nor necessarily gendered, the case for asserting their historically predictable *de facto* 'masculinization' has been compellingly rehearsed by feminist writers. Women's lower incomes and remnants of the whore stigma have alike survived into the post-modern culture, while the higher paid male clientele typically evades the charges of either ontological or moral deficit. Nor is the current predicament of women in Eastern Europe and the old Soviet countries coincidental: for some it represents but one aspect of a ubiquitous 'feminisation of poverty' in the nation-states of the semi-periphery and periphery. But the causal relevance of gender relations for sex work goes deeper than this. Men in pre-capitalist as well as in liberal, organized and disorganized capitalist social formations sustained institutional means for satisfying their desires (Ringdal, 2004; Roberts, 1992). Pre-existing institutions were simply, if often dramatically, *re-cast* with the advent of capitalism after the fashion of the class relations of the formal economy.

Ethnic Relations

If sex work was gendered prior to its re-casting in line with class and command relations, this historical precedence also obtains for the logic of tribalism and ethnic relations (although *contemporary* forms of neo-colonialism can only be structurally elaborated in terms of relations of class and command). As far as sex workers emanating from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet states are concerned, Agathangelou (2004) has perspicuously described them as 'white but not quite'. This phrase announces two important themes. Ethnic relations, first, play a causal role in facilitating and legitimating London's exploitative and oppressive sex industry. And second, through the medium of racial stereotyping, they complement the erotic with the exotic, enhancing profitability in the process.

Many male clients seek out sex workers with an ethnic, national or class identity that differs from their own (Kempadoo, 1994; Shrage, 1994). Superficially, this behaviour may feed their fantasies. Referring to the recent influx of women from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet bloc into Cyprus, one local immigration police officer commented:

It is a change of product. It is a change of commodity. It is a change in people's desires. The women from the former Soviet states and Eastern European countries possess bodily skills: long legs, they are tall and beautiful and can work in the top cabarets. (cited in Agathangelou, 2004: 63)

Structurally, as Agathangelou observes, the story is more complex than references to fantasies and 'bodily skills' imply:

The purchasers of reproductive labour are typically oblivious to the racist practices and discourses they bring to economic transactions because racist, sexist and class violence functions on structural levels. We may be all participating in these racist and sexist practices, but the emotional and economic costs of racism fall disproportionately on the shoulders of migrant women (positive and negative stereotyping) from lower-income generating nation-states. (2004: 65–6)

Stigma Relations

Each of the women interviewed in London was responsive to the idea of a whore stigma, and their behaviour, particularly around what Goffman (1968) calls the 'management of information', confirmed the potency of the felt stigma associated with their work. Only Leah had disclosed to her family. Yet Pheterson's characterization of the whore stigma seems dated, the product of the culture of organized rather than disorganized capitalism, of a time when what Gross calls the regulative tradition of intimacy still held sway. On the back of an impressive 15 year prospective study of 130 women, Day and Ward (2004c: 166) advance a three-stage model of stigma:

In brief, sex workers came into the industry concerned about a blemish on their characters; they shared views that were common inside and outside prostitution about this 'whore stigma'. After a short time, however, women represented stigma in largely social and structural terms, emphasizing how this 'whore stigma' was produced and reproduced through policy, law, gender relations and the organization of work. The 'whore stigma' was thereby credited largely to the external world. Later still, women were often concerned once more about a blemish on their own characters, albeit one caused by social oppression. More specifically, they felt that the stigma had affected their lives and they spoke especially about their mental well-being and life chances.

The women I interviewed showed some of the characteristics of Ward and Day's second phase. What was striking, however, was the apparent ease with which they were able to switch sets of identities. This was true even of those with very limited exposure to sex work, like Sarah, but it was emphatic in older and more experienced practitioners like Gabby and Wendy, the latter a 30 year old graduate, ex-teacher who had several periods of escort work behind her, as well as two flats purchased in St Petersburg with the proceeds. Reference was made earlier to the notion of self-turnover as a post-modern cultural by-product of newly reinvigorated class relations. Just as the sex workers I met *were* and *were not* in the trade, so the felt stigma they experienced *was* and *was not* at the core of their self-identities. They were able to sign in and out of *petit* narratives with a degree of equanimity. Yet felt stigma among opportunists might yet, as Ward and Day would predict, exact a longer-term price in terms of wellbeing.

The Overall Picture Re-Visited

In Figure 3 earlier, a number of properties of the present epoch of disorganized capitalism were sketched. It is time now to return to explore dialectically aspects of the relations between this 'sense of the whole' and what has emerged from brief reflections on the causal impacts of relations of class, command, gender, ethnicity and stigma on the specific figuration of those of London's women escort workers originating from Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet republics.

Self-evidently, women's purposeful migration to opportunistic sex work in a foreign city is symptomatic of economic, political and cultural processes of globalization. Gender and ethnic relations provide a causal backcloth. Processes

of globalization are part and parcel of a new dynamic between relations of class and command, with the former increasingly categorical and the latter derivative across a wide range of figurations. Class may have lost much of its (subjective) salience for identity formation, but it manifestly does not follow that its (objective) salience has diminished; indeed, the evidence is quite to the contrary (Scambler, 2002). The emergence of a post-welfare statist philosophy of personal responsibility is another by-product of this same dynamic, as is the destandardization of work, positively glossed as 'flexible specialization' but more negatively cast as work and workplace insecurity. Paradoxically, prostitution or sex work has long exhibited many of the features of destandardized work. In this respect at least it has become more like other forms of paid work than hitherto. The class-driven culture-ideology of consumption buttresses and partially explains, without explaining away, the post-modernization of culture. This cultural shift, in turn, has facilitated both the translation of the nuclear family ideal from *grand* to *petit* narrative and self-turnover with respect to identity formation. It is a cultural shift of peculiar pertinence to sex work, which has become a far more volatile and negotiable enterprise.

Three things are immediately apparent if the jigsaw model is applied to illuminate and help explain forms of sex work stigma. The first is that relations of stigma can be grasped sociologically only as part of a nexus of social structures or relations, each with causal potential, differentially informing events in a given figuration. Moreover, such is the heterogeneity not only of the sex work population itself but also of sex work figurations – increasingly involving migration – that no single *transfigurational* explanatory model will do. Recent patterns of migration to cities like London on the part of young women from Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet states epitomize sex work heterogeneity, and, as Agustin (2006a) rightly observes, good sociological studies of such cohorts are exceptional. While all of the core social relations discussed here are likely to be causally influential across most figurations, which are categorical, derivative or circumstantial will vary considerably.

Second, there is an enduring tension between structure and agency. Archer (1995) has shown how an individual's initially 'involuntary placement' in society brings in its wake 'vested interests' which the mediating mechanism of 'opportunity costs' helps translate into consciousness or conduct. Reasons for actions, structurally filtered, often become rationalizations appropriate to an individual's vested interests. Can there be such phenomena as 'voluntary adult sex work'? Eradicating the very possibility of rational action in this context is disrespectful and fallacious (Scambler and Scambler, 1997). There is agency even among the coerced and destined. Jesson (2004: 212) has, with justification, commended many sex workers as 'heroines in their own lives'. But all choice is structured, and post-modern culture favours a 'rhetoric of choice' that is often (a) an ideological device covering for a profiteering consumerism, and (b) a legitimacy device allowing for the political attribution of deviance to those who choose 'irresponsibly'. Structural forces such as class, command and gender become 'invisible' (Brannen and Nilsen, 2005: 423). If voluntary adult

sex work can be the outcome of agency, of rational action, then the sociological challenge is to study how such agency is structured across a variety of figurations in the contemporary glocalised social world.

Finally, it is evident that the law and policing of sex work can be neither understood nor humane and effective unless attention is paid to the industry's structural underpinnings, as well as to those of the law and police. This is also the message of Brooks-Gordon's (2006) impressive study. Her judgement of the British government's current and fifth exploration of the laws surrounding sex work in the last 50 years is understandably harsh. She condemns the Green Paper 'Paying the Price' (Home Office, 2004) and the subsequent Government Strategy (Home Office, 2006) for ignoring not only structural issues but an accumulated body of research on sex workers *and their clients*. What is in prospect, she suggests, is an empirically unsupportable and ill-advised – oppressive – disruption of indoor sex work and a tougher treatment of clients. This is consonant with Agustin's observation that the switch to a 'moral', anti-trafficking agenda facilitates the avoidance of uncomfortable truths for Western societies like Britain: 'their enormous demand for sexual services and the fact that many women do not mind or prefer this occupation to others available to them' (Agustin, 2006b: 29).

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Graham Scambler

Is Professor of Medical Sociology at UCL. His interests encompass critical social theory, health, sex work and sport, all areas in which he has published. Recent single-authored books include *Health and Social Change* (Open University Press, 2002) and *Sport and Society* (Open University Press, 2005). He is founding co-editor of the international journal *Social Theory and Health*.

Address: Centre for Behavioural & Social Sciences in Medicine, UCL, Charles Bell House, 67–73 Riding House Street, London W1W 7EJ, UK.

E-mail: rmhagns@ucl.ac.uk